GUIDE TO THE SF21 SIRIONÓ FILE

[The Sirionó (or Mbia) are a semi-nomadic group living in Eastern Bolivia who exist in small bands scattered throughout the high forests of the eastern and northern part of the Province of Beni (13-17 degrees South latitude, 61-65 degrees West longitude). They speak a Tupi-Guaraní language, spoken elsewhere by groups of a more complex culture, but here only represented by themselves and the Guarayú-Pausema, both of whom have closely related dialects.

Population statistics on the Sirionó are rather unreliable. An estimate by d'Orbigny in 1825 places the number of Sirionó at about one thousand, while Holmberg, in the early 1940's, estimates their number at about two thousand.

Hunting and gathering are basic to the Sirionó economy, although a small amount of agriculture is practiced in rude clearings in the forest. Crops grown are maize (a soft red variety), sweet manioc, sweet potatoes, papaya, cotton, and tobacco.

As noted previously, the Sirionó are organized into bands composed of matrilineally extended families. The size of the bands varies from 30-40 people up to as many as 120. When making camp the Sirionó erect a single temporary shelter of poles lashed to trees and covered with palm leaves. A separate section is reserved in this shelter for each of the several extended families composing the band. Because of the great distance over which the

Siriono travel, and also because of their seasonal activities, contact between various bands is minimal.

Each band is governed by a chief, who is succeeded in the office by his eldest son, provided the latter is a good hunter. The main prerogative of the chief seems to be that he has the privilege of hanging his hammock in the center of the house. His duties include making suggestions as to migrations, hunting activities and where to plant, but these suggestions may or may not be followed by the rest of the band, outside of his own immediate family.

The preferred form of marriage is with the daughter of a maternal uncle. Sororal polygyny and local endogamy prevail. Descent among the Siriono is matrilineal in exogamous matri-lineages, but as noted above, succession to the chieftainship is patrilineal. Kinship terminology is of the Crow type. (Note: This reflects the traditional interpretation of Siriono kinship structure, which has been challenged in later analyses.)

Religion among the Siriono is highly animistic and there is no evidence of a belief in a supreme being. Fear of evil spirits pervades the religious system and these spirits are believed to cause sickness and death.

The SF21 Siriono file consists of five sources, four in English and one a translation from the German (5: Radwan). The primary source for the whole file is 1: Holmberg, a classic of ethnographic writing on a little known people. This source, in conjunction with 5: Radwan, which also gives a very detailed account of the Siriono in the period

around 1928, provides an excellent overall coverage of the Sirionó up to the period of about 1941-1942. The section on sex in 1: Holmberg, pp. 63-65, has been omitted from the source, and instead these pages make up the bulk of the rather "heady" if not "juicy" fair for 2: Holmberg in this file. 3: Métraux is a very sketchy account of the Sirionó compiled primarily from secondary source material. 4: Ryden deals principally with the material culture of the Sirionó.

Taken as a whole, the Sirionó file contains some substantial ethnographic information, but because it was processed in the early 1950's when the "old style" file slip procedure was in operation, it is rather cumbersome to use. Most of the fieldwork reflected in the file was done in the early 1940's and in 1928. The file was processed approximately in the period of 1950-1955.]